

The

HISTORIAN

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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Bay St. Louis, Mississippi

June 1997

JUNE HAPPENINGS

The June meeting of the Hancock County Historical Society will be held at 12 noon on Thursday, June 19 at the Kate Lobrano House, 108 Cue Street, Bay St. Louis.

Guest speaker for the luncheon will be Beth Carriere, Executive Director of the Hancock County Tourism Development Bureau. She will address the goals of the Bureau and the role the Historical Society can play in achieving them.

Please call 467-4090 for reservations. Cost is \$6.00. Our maximum seating capacity is 60 guests, so please make your reservations early.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

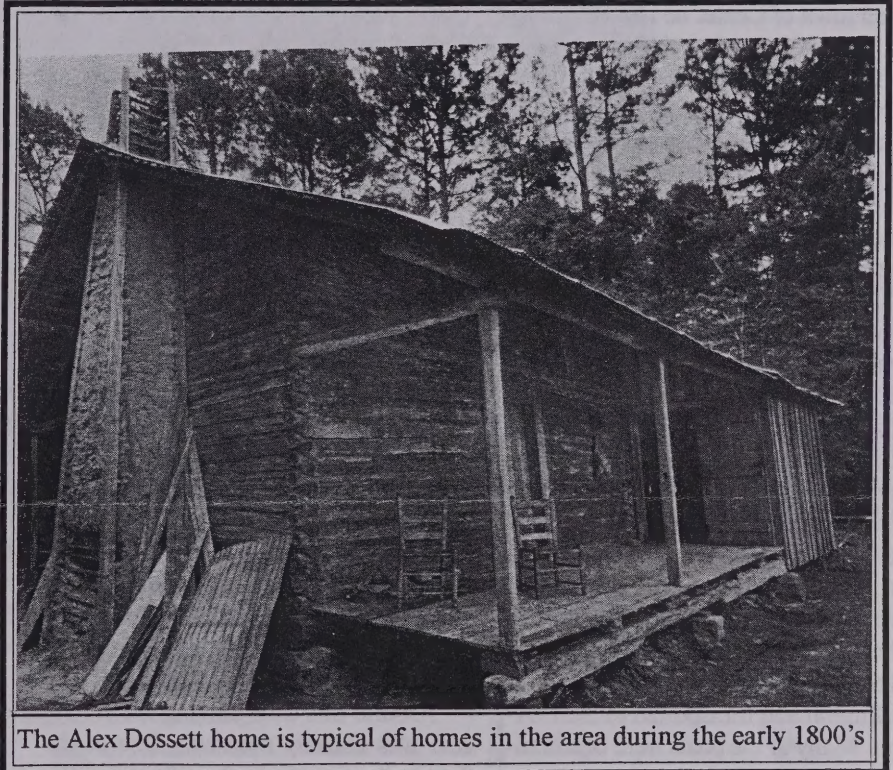
First North Hancock County Historical Society Meeting

On Sunday, May 25, 1997, Shirley and Don Munson arranged a meeting of some residents of the north part of Hancock county which was held at the Berry Patch store and restaurant just east of Caesar.

Among those attending were Charles Gray, president of the Hancock County Historical Society, Don and Shirley Munson, Alvin and Dell Lee, Atrice Lee, Marvin Pierson, Harley Lee, Juanita Gex, Elaine Lee, Slyvonne Lee, George Harrison and Glenn Neal.

The purpose of this meeting was to establish a center for participation of area residents in the recording of Hancock County history. Several of those who were present joined the Society.

(Continued on page 3)



The Alex Dossett home is typical of homes in the area during the early 1800's

HANCOCK COUNTY'S ORIGINS

Hancock County, which was named for John Hancock, president of the Continental Congress, was formed in 1812 in anticipation of the formation of the state of Mississippi. At that time it included a large area which has subsequently been subdivided into Hancock, Pearl River, part of Marion and most of Stone and Harrison Counties.

The first division came in 1841 when Hancock county was separated into Hancock and Harrison counties. Until then, residents of Harrison County living in the Biloxi area were compelled to

travel to Gainesville to attend to civic affairs.

In 1880, again primarily because of the time required to travel from remote sections of the county, a further division was made with the formation of Pearl County from the northern half of Hancock County. The newly separated section was unable to establish adequate facilities and it became once more a part of Hancock County.

In 1890, however, a second attempt to separate the northern section of the county was made and Pearl River County was formed.

In 1908 a further section of Hancock

County was given to Pearl River County, including present-day Picayune and its environs.

Mississippi became a state in December 1817 but the territorial divisions began much earlier. In 1811 there was a mass meeting to form a county government and a meeting was held at Burnt Meeting House on the old Columbia-Gainesville Road. It was here that Hancock County received its name and a delegation was sent to the Mississippi Territorial Legislature to ask that the **Indian town of Center be named county seat.** It was located at the point where all roads and trails in the county crossed and was the largest population center in the county. The delegation succeeded and Center became the first county seat of the new county.

The first public building in the county, a log meeting house, which was used as a church, a school and a meeting house, burned. Its replacement was named the Burnt Meeting House.

In 1814-1817 Andrew Jackson's army had a campsite about one half mile east of Caesar. Artillery and heavy equipment were moved southwest on the road toward Gainesville. Nearly all of this road has been abandoned down to Flat Top, but the present road from there down to Napoleon is the old military road laid out by Jackson's engineers. Troops and equipment were boarded on boats at Pearlington and transported to New Orleans. Many of the boats were commandeered from pirates and robbers.

Center had a log courthouse, a jail, a hotel, a barroom, a couple of small stores, a few homes and 50 to 100 wigwams. It also had a postoffice. However, there was another site in Mississippi already called Center. Therefore the name had to be changed. A man named Boston was postmaster at the time and he suggested "Caesar" which was accepted although it had no local significance.

When the Pearl River and Honey Island areas were cleared of robbers and brigands after the War of 1812, people began to settle along the river and by 1830 the population center had shifted to Gainesville, so the courthouse was moved there. When the Indians were

removed to the Indian Territory, Center slowly disappeared.

The last Choctaw chief who lived there was Muchibira who sold the land to Stephen Jarrell, a French trader who established a place on the bank of the Hobolochitto River. The river was named for Hobolo, an early chief of the Choctaws. "Chitto" is the Choctaw word for stream.

(The above is taken from writings of S. G. Thigpen, *Next Door To Heaven and Pearl River, Highway to Glory Land*).

The site of old Gainesville gives visitors a glimpse of what the city must have looked like. The view of the broad curving Pearl River is spectacular from the bluff where Dr. Ambrose Gaines received his land grant for 500 arpents (French measurement approximately equivalent to acres) in 1810.

On April 1, 1853 the courthouse at Gainesville burned. However, county records show that the circuit court met in April 1861 "at the courthouse in Gainesville", the exact building being unspecified. In May 1865 an attempt was made to hold court in Buck Branch in the present territory of Pearl River County. When the judge failed to appear, court was dismissed until next day. Again the judge did not come, so the sheriff adjourned the court. No further court sessions were held until December 1865 when the Civil War ended.

Around this time moving the county seat was warmly debated. One of the first indications is in the minutes of the Board of Police for January 6, 1867 in which the low bid of W. J. Poitevent for \$2,100.00 to build a jail was approved.

This is the first record of a county jail, although there is an authorization during the war for the sheriff to sell the jail irons at auction. The reason for the sale is not given. If a jail were actually built in Gainesville it would, of course, be an argument against moving the county seat.

In 1867 an act of the state legislature authorized an election to determine the future county seat.

The minutes of the Board of Police for a special March term in 1867 show the following: "Whereas at an election held

at the various precincts of Hancock County of the 3rd Monday, 18th day of March 1867, under a recent act of the Legislature of the State of Mississippi for the county seat of justice of said county, at it appearing further to the satisfaction of the Board that Gainesville retained the highest number of votes for the said seat of Justice.

"It is therefore ordered by the Board that the said town of Gainesville be and is this date declared the seat of Justice of this County. (The above appeared in the HANCOCK HAWK, Jan 19, 1973 taken from the works compiled by the Works Progress Administration.)

Increased economic activity to the south resulted in shifting the population center to the Gulf Coast.

The county board, obviously partisan in the matter, did not have the last word, as shown by records of the circuit court for the first Monday after the fourth Monday in April of the same year.

"Board of Police of Hancock County. On motion of preemptory mandamus to proceed to provide public buildings and establish the seat of Justice at Shieldsborough:

"It appearing to the satisfaction of the Court that the majority of the qualified voters of Hancock County at the election held on the 3rd Monday in March 1867, were cast for the city of Shieldsborough...

"It is therefore ordered, adjudged and decreed, and the Court by virtue of the power and authority vested by the constitution and laws of the state of Mississippi does command the Board of Police to establish the seat of justice of the county in conformity with the choice of the qualified voters."

The May term of the Police Court was held at Shieldsborough in accordance with that decision, and the following resolution was adopted:

"It appearing to the satisfaction of the Board that the city of Shieldsborough in said county received the majority of the legal votes of said county for the permanent county seat of Justice,

"It is therefore ordered by the Board that the said city of Shieldsborough be and is hereby declared after this date the permanent seat of Justice of the County."

We can only guess at the bitterness of the contest that is indicated by these formal records, and at the meaning of the distinction between "the highest number of votes" specified in one resolution and the "Majority of the legal votes" stated in the other. The decision must have been intensely unpleasant for the members of a board that were so evidently in favor of Gainesville.

Charles H. Gray

(President from page 1)

The new members were asked to make lists of locations of interest (churches, cemeteries, schools etc) both presently standing and demolished, etc. and bring them to the next meeting.

Since the group was very enthusiastic and anxious to begin recording the history of the area, I returned on the following Tuesday. Shirley and Don Munson, Harley Lee and I met once more at the Berry Patch and drove north on Leetown Road to photograph and record the Breland Cemetery.

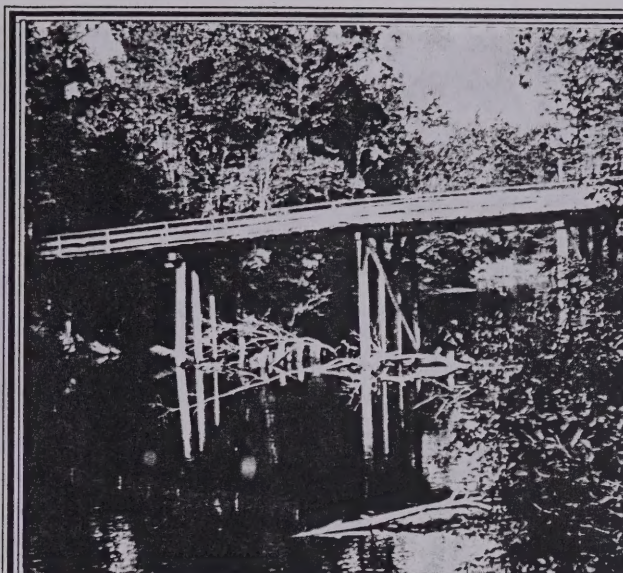
Afterwards, we then took Parson Powell Road to Caesar where we visited the large and impressive Union Baptist Church. We were given a copy of their *Sesquicentennial Program and History* which contains much helpful information.

Just west of Caesar we toured and photographed the Gipson Cemetery.

We then visited Josephine Magehee at the Picayune Library where they have an extensive historical and genealogical department. In fact, Karen Flores, the Historical Society Director, and I returned to the library on the following Thursday and made copies of many documents about Hancock county.

The new computers, digital camera and scanner at the Historical Society have so greatly enhanced our ability to identify and record data that we are now able to expand to the point that we are truly the **Hancock County Historical Society**. A very warm welcome is extended to our new members and we ask you to help us learn about your area and record your history too.

Charles H. Gray



This 19th Century toll bridge near Caesar was for many years the only bridge across the Holobochitto River.

Pass Christian Historical Society Burns Mortgage

Congratulations to our friends at the Pass Christian Historical Society who have just paid off the mortgage on their beautiful building. This is another great step toward establishing a *permanent* historical unit coast-wide.

NEW MEMBERS FOR JUNE

We have had a request from a member to list the home town or state of new members. Accordingly:

Guy C. Kraus, Pass Christian, Ms.

Jeff Nacarvis, BSL

Cheryl Morris, Council Bluff, Ia.

Roy Bourgeois, Gautier, Ms.

Marsha Heitkamp, BSL

Charlie Heitkamp, BSL

Gene Scafidi, BSL

Dr. Ron Graham, BSL

Charlie Graham, BSL

Ann Ashman, Waveland, Ms.

Fr. Bob Kelly, BSL

Maxine Brewer, Waynesboro, Ms.

Harlie Lee, Picayune, Ms.

Alvin Lee, Picayune, Ms.

Juanita Gex, Picayune, Ms.

Marvin Pierson, Picayune, Ms.

Elton Foster, Pass Christian

Helen Foster, Pass Christian

Dottie Robbins, Diamondhead

Bill Robbins, Diamondhead

Gulf Coast Antiques Show

The Gulf Coast Antiques Show will be held at the Coliseum in Biloxi on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, June 20 -22. These dealers helped us enormously when we sponsored the antiques shows at Gulfport. Discount tickets will be given out at the Thursday luncheon or may be picked up at the Lobrano House.

LOBRANO HOUSE HOURS

Monday	8 a.m.
through	to
Friday	4 p.m.

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DOES ANYONE KNOW THIS HOUSE AND WHERE IT WAS LOCATED?
WHO WAS DR. KOTZ ALLEN? PHONE THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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HISTORICAL SOCIETY SUPPORTERS

WE APPRECIATE THE SUPPORT THAT THE FOLLOWING MEMBERS HAVE GIVEN TO THE
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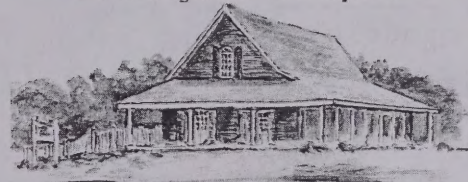
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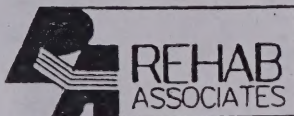
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